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Atari Online News, Etc.
A-ONE Online Magazine
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A-ONE #0134 10/22/99

~ AMD Eyes 1000MHz Chip! ~ People Are Talking! ~ 73 GB Drives!
~ Congressional Spam Bill~ ISP Pricing Plans Vary ~ Gas-powered PCs?
~ CoMa Voice/Pro 5.1.0! ~ Crash Team Racing! ~ P.O.V. Rates Sites
~ Kids' Online Privacy! ~ Blue Mountain To Sell! ~ New 'Tomb Raider'!

-* Encyclopedia Brittanica Free *-
-* Microsoft Case Decided On 'A Friday' *-
-* Microsoft Lobbying Attempts To Cut Funding *-

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->From the Editor’s Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
"""""""""""""""""""""""""""

As the old (new?) saying goes, technology marches on! It’s amazing how far we’ve come in the past few years. PCs have continually become more sophisticated and faster. Technology outdates itself in a matter of months, rather than years. If you don’t keep up fairly regularly, you tend to get left behind. Additionally, these days (the past year), the potential dangers of the Y2K "bug" has "forced" technological improvements to beat this problem. What once worked very well for the average user now will not due to an oversight that could have been avoided.

Atari computers are among those technological wonders of yesteryear that are rapidly becoming outdated. Many people feel the need to upgrade to more powerful and current machines like the PC and Mac - it happens. Still, many of us continue to use Atari computers on a regular basis. And, of course, there are many who try to take advantage of both worlds.

PC technology also creates other "victims". What was once a vast community of bulletin boards has become a rarity, overshadowed by the internet. And similarly, the online services have become more and more web-based. Services such as AOL and Prodigy were web-based from the beginning. CompuServe recently converted its text-based system to HMI. And just recently, Delphi has announced that text-based access to its service via Tymnet and SprintNet will be discontinued on January 1.

Initially, this news struck me pretty hard. I’ve been a Delphi user for over 10 years. In fact, I currently manage the Atari Forum on Delphi. I’m also a text-side user even though I have the ability to access Delphi via the internet, on my PC. I just prefer the ease and speed of the text side of Delphi.

Fortunately, however, the text side of Delphi is not going away. Users will still be able to use text access, but the manner in which users can connect will obviously change; they’ll have to telnet in via a shell account using another ISP. And, for users who are "local" to Delphi’s home in Cambridge, Massachusetts, they’ll continue to have direct access to Delphi’s local numbers - at least for the present. In that regard, I’ll be one of the lucky ones. This will also give me more time to figure out how to telnet in, since I haven’t the slightest idea how that process works!

Will these changes at Delphi present problems for Atari users and other users of platforms that are no longer being upgraded? Of course. For some, getting another ISP may create problems of sorts. For others, it may prove impossible to telnet in. And others may just say the hell with it and leave Delphi. For the rest of us, we’ll likely muddle through during the next couple of months trying to get the proper programs and modules working in order to continue our satisfying use of an enjoyable and friendly online service. Still, you have to feel another unavoidable bit of pain due to the rapid growth of technology. But, even with this additional obstacle, Atari users will continue to be a part of the Delphi community for a little while longer. That, in and of itself, is a reward. We’re still not beaten into PC-submission just yet!

Until next time...

CoMa Voice/Pro 5.1.0 (Communication Manager)

Siegfried Hartmann <SiggiH@gmx.de>

Programme-Name: CoMa for Atari Voice/Pro 5.1.0 (COmmunication-MAnager)
Purpose: Fax & voice-mail-system, to send & receive fax,
answering machine, mailbox & terminal with internal z-modem
Requirement: Computer with MagiC[Mac|PC] or TOS
Download: from Softbaer-Mailbox: +4930/62709-572 (ISDN X.75 & V.34)
or homepage: <http://i.am/Softbaer>
CoMa_Atari_5.1.0.zip (689 KBytes)

CoMa has the following common functions and attributes in all levels
- English documentation
- Support for the Elsa MicroLink Office & USR 56k (Pro)Message(Plus) modem self-mode(read fax and voice & configuration)
- Fax-class 2 & 2.0
- Polling (send poll-request-tone only with class 2.0 and some class 2-modems)

- Network-capable fax-job-management (3 jobs in 24 hours)
- Serial fax
- Display of the calling-number with ISDN-modems
- Display of call units with ISDN-Modems
- Internal editor
- Incoming pages are displayed during fax-reception !!
- Text can be mixed with graphic-logos and signatures
- Fax-voice-data-number management, including groups
- Management for incoming fax/messages/mails
- Administration of 16 telephone companies
- Zone- & and time-dependent selection of telephone-company
- Mailbox with internal send & receive-z-modem
- Terminal mit internal z-modem & x-modem for modem firmware upload

* * * * * * * * * * CoMa Voice (additional) * * * * * * * * * *

- Answering machine for ZyXEL, Elsa/TKR, USR, Dr. Neuhaus, Lasat and much modems with Rockwell-Chipset
- Day & time programmable answering messages
- Multiple outgoing messages for several ISDN-MSN
- Time dependent redirection of incoming calls
- Remote control / recall of new received faxes
- Recall of 7 special messages by DTMF-code
- Real time decoding of sound for Mac/Atari-Soundsystem of ZxXEL ADPCM3/ADPCM4, Smarty/Cybermod u-Law- & Rockwell ADPCM4-Sounds
- Wave-Sound conversion in ZyXEL- & Cybermod- & Rockwell-format

* * * * * * CoMa Professional Version (additional) * * * * * *

- Fax- and voice-on-demand-system
- Any amount of messages via DTMF tone recall is possible
- Each category can contain up to 100 messages and/or 100 fax-pages.
- Statistic of category recalls
- Voice-messages can be put together from multiple voice-files.
- For the mailbox you can assign personal passwords and download-folders to as many users as you want

 - Personal message for each caller, who has an entry in the numbers-list
   (with ZyXEL Elite & MicroLink ISDN, if caller MSN is displayed)
 - Unlimited fax-jobs
 - Fax transmission via polling request (DTMF-PIN not needed -
   only for Class 2.0 modems)
 - Permanent poll-sender possible (caller gets fax pages even without
   sending a poll-request)
 - Time-dependent messages for 10 MSNs for ISDN
 - Connect-kind can differ for each MSN

* * * * * * * * * * * New in CoMa 5.1.0 * * * * * * * * * * * * *

* * * Voice * * *

- New entry in the calls list for "voice out" if only the OGM was played,
  but no incoming message was recorded
- New calls-filter type "Only Voice Out"
- Logbook entry for OGMs
- Logbook will open with the new entry in the function pop-up
- After silence is detected, the message-end file is played and no data- or
  fax-receive is tried, if a DTMF-code has been recognized previously
* * * Terminal/Mailbox * * *
- X-modem protocol for modem firmware upload
- Mailbox: only one entry in the calls list by new login

* * * Fax * * *

- IMG-files in fax-outgoing-, polling-, jobs-, or demand-folder will be
  send now without manual converting in fax-format
- Alert-box if fax number is missing while making a fax job
- Date in SENDINFO.TXT is now 4 digits long (just for a better design, not
  really necessary!)

* * * Selfmode * * *

- For Microlink Office FW1.20: tollsaver can be disabled now
- USR Message Plus: the data is been checked if they are in valid range
- USR Message Plus: no alert-box "no modem response"

* * * General * * *

- 16 telephone companies adjustable
- Closing a text-window can be canceled now
- Various bugfixes

<mailto:S.Hartmann@berlin.de> or <mailto:SiggiH@gmx.de>
<http://i.am/Softbaer> or <http://ww.ThePentagon.com/Softbaer>
Mailbox: 030/62709-572 ISDN X.75 (64000 bps) & V.34 (28800 bps)
Voice: 030/62709-466 Fax: -459 Voice & Fax-On-Demand-Test-System: -573

->A-ONE User Group Notes! - Meetings, Shows, and Info!
  """""""""""""""""""""""""

Wessex Atari Group Meeting

From: Roy Goring <news@incontrolinternet.co.uk>

The meeting due on 23/10/99 is CANCELLED :-(
A new date will be posted soon :-)

Yours Roy

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING

compiled by Joe Mirando
jmirando@portone.com

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. I guess that you've heard about Delphi dropping dial-in access by now. If you haven't, look around elsewhere in this issue for the info. What it comes down to is that if you access Delphi by dialing either a Tymnet or SprintNet number, you are going to have to get an ISP in order to access it after the first of the year. Evidently text access will remain, but you'll have to go over the internet to get to it.

It looks like STinG (or PPPConnect), an ISP and a telnet program are going to be the only way that we ST'ers will be able to get into Delphi. The problem is that, with the telnet programs that I'm aware of, you cannot upload or download files. Delphi's strong suit, in my opinion, is its file library. If you're aware of a telnet client for the ST/TT/Falcon that supports uploading and downloading, please email me and tell me about it.

For those of you who have never used a telnet client, let me explain it as simply as I can. A telnet program is, for all intents and purposes, a terminal program designed to work over the internet instead of dialing in to a service like Delphi, Genie, or CompuServe. Telnet programs actually work quite well. The problem is that you need to have an internet connection up and running in order to be able to use them.

Before the time arrives, A-ONE fully intends to have the files, directions, and support you want or need to get internet-ready. Brace yourselves folks, here comes progress.

The only other thing on my mind tonight has to do with my current passion... SETI@Home. Searching for extraterrestrials might sound like the stuff that movies are made of, but the plain truth is that there really isn't much interaction at the user level. Evidently there have been a few people who decided to spice things up my modifying the SETI@Home search program. I'm sure that they had only the best intentions, but the fact is that this could possibly invalidate the entire project. I know that having 1.3 million participants involved makes this seem like some huge class project, but make no mistake.... this is REAL science. Everything must be just so or the whole shootin' match could be ruined. Scientific inquiry relies on protocols and control of everything possible. In most cases, that includes everything except the phenomenon being studied.

I can remember back a few years when they did detect two instances of what could have been signals from outside the solar system. Of course, without the legion of users that they have today, it was many months before the signal was actually noticed and the time on a radio telescope could be obtained to re-examine the portions of the sky from which the signals had been detected. By the time all of this came to pass, there were no signals to be found. Lost time may well have delayed what would be the discovery of all time.

Should the current project find an extraterrestrial signal of intelligent origin, we really don't need to spend the time to figure out whether or not the result is valid because someone modified the screensaver in some way. What we WOULD need would be quick response and speedy verification... without having to worry about whether the signal was actually detected in the first place. So if you've gotten a modified version of SETI@Home, please remove it and get an "official" copy from the SETI@Home website (http://setiathome.ssl.berkeley.edu).

Now let's get to the news, hints, tips, and info available on the UseNet.

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup

Derek Hunt posts:

" I've just collected a few .ST files from the 'net. Anyone like to give me some info on this type of file and how to use it on my STFM (4MB) TOS 1.00/2.06?"

Maciejj Rozmus tells Derek:

"This is a disc image format used by Pacifist. To convert it back to "normal" form you need ST2DISK program. It should be on most web sites with .ST files."

Marcus Herbert asks about adding a hard drive to his ST:

"I have an old MegaST2 and I want to put a cheap 60MB 2.5" IDE HD into it. Is there any adaptor on the market for doing this? Perhaps any of you has such an adaptor/controller and is willing to sell it to me - I am living in germany."

Martin-Eric Racine tells Marcus:

"See this page for Mario Becroft's IDE interface:

http://www.ak.planet.gen.nz/user/mario/"

Marcus tells Martin-Eric:

"Thanks for the hint! Btw.. his address has changed:

http://gem.win.co.nz/mario/hardware/ide.html"

"Kukulkan" asks about emulators:

"I have two questions:

I just downloaded Gemulator but I don’t have the ST ROM PCI cards. I found the TOSs at The Little Green Desktop but...

1. Which TOS version should I use?

2. How do I read TOS from the Gemulator? Do I have to put it on a floppy or on C:\?"

Roger Cain tells Kukulkan:

"It (the TOS version) doesn’t really matter - why not go for V2.06? This is a good, stable version.

In theory you just stick it on C:\ and tell Gemulator "First Time Set-Up" to search the hard disc for the O/S.

However ..... I have been having enormous problems with this technique. The docs. for the free version of Gemulator tell you that v2.06 should be re-named to MAGIC_PC.OS. Well, this sometimes works, sometimes it doesn’t.

You may need to re-set things by deleting the Gem98.ini file in C:\Windows. I have attempted to load Gemulator v5 with TOS 2.06, Magic v5.11 and the Magic which comes with the MagicPC demo. Gemulator (according to the docs) is supposed to Search for and remember all of these from the HD so that you can choose how to initialise Gemulator. Well, I have tried everything .....

it will NEVER find more than one of these O/S and, if you put a foot wrong, it will often find NONE of them. This is no way to promote a product!

When I then run the emulation I get a screen of vertical bars (with Magic_PC.OS) or a weird wallpaper pattern (with TOS v2.06). The on-line docs say that there have been troubles with the ATI graphics card (which I am using) but these are circumvented by using the latest drivers or by setting the colour resolution to 16-bit.

I have tried both of these but get absolutely NO satisfaction.

I wish you luck with Gemulator but, as far as I am concerned, it’s a non-working program!"

Andy Morgan adds:

"You too huh? I’ve got TOS-images for 1.00, 2.06, SUPER and KAOS - gemulator refuses to find any of them. In fact, if you tell it to go and look nothing happens

All my files are still *.IMGes should I rename them? The documentation appears to claim that you need Magic to run gemulator - anyone know if this is true?

Like I say, my copy (I’m using the free ·98 version on W95) doesn’t even try to look for the files, you click on "search hard disk and nothing happens. Gemulator itself will then only allow 800XL emulation to be used."

Mike Brent asks:

"I’m hoping to buy an Atari machine now, as it has been several years since I used my Atari 800. It was fun, but I lost track of what Atari was producing. Should I buy a Falcon030 or a TT030 ?? Or maybe a MEGA 2 system. I want it for home entertainment. Someone told me they thought the TT030 was for music and the Falcon was for home FUN and games.

How much did these computers cost when new???"

"Mikey" tells Mike:

"TT’s are a nice workstation, and have an excellent memory upgrade available. Going out on a limb, I would say for entertainment, the Falcon is your best bet. More hardware support for audio, superior video for art work and games (standard configuration anyway). I think the base price for a Falcon with 4mb of memory and no hard disk was about $800.00 US. Not sure about the TT, but I think well over a grand. Both are nice machines. You could probably get the pair for under a grand now, but I think you would find yourself using the Falcon more. Much different than an 800."

Stephen Moss asks about desktop programs:

"After many years of using an ST (TOS 1.02) I finally got around to buying a hard drive which is now leading me consider using a replacement desktop so that I can place the program files on the desktop as opposed to having go through various drives and windows to find the program file.

Having read a review comparing Ease, Neodesk and Thing I had decided upon Neodesk, but now I also have a Falcon (TOS 4.04) and I need to consider both machines.

As most of my software probably won’t multi-task due to the fact that it was written pre Falcon it does not need to be Magic C compatible as I probably wont be using Magic C.

So which is the best of these desktops and how do they compare to what I assume is the relative new comer of System Solutions Jinnee."

Jeffery Thomas tells Stephen:

"Well if you want to try something extra cheap, there’s Teradesk which can be downloaded off of any web archive around. You should get version 1.4 since it’s most up to date. It’s freeware, and I use it the majority of the time since it has a nice and fast file copy capability, plus a few other nice interface features.

I’ve put in a lot of time in on Neodesk too. Neodesk has the advantage of supporting what are called program groups. Basically you can group several names in a list which are accessible through a window after clicking on an icon for that group. It’s similar to windows 3.1 program groups. The only thing that puts me off Neodesk is that the file operations like delete and copy are much slower than I care for, hence why I took a backward step to using Teradesk. Now I mostly use Neodesk in conjunction with Geneva multitasking.

Thing I have at least tried, and I find it to be a very good environment. It needs TOS 1.04 or better. It also has program groups. Aside from that it seems okay, although I haven’t taken the time to benchmark it’s file operation times."

Well folks, that's it for this week. Tune in again next week, same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - 'Crash Team Racing'!!
"""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""" A New 'Tomb Raider' On the Way!
Songbird Updates!
'Virtua Fighter 3tb'!
And much more!

->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!
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Tomb Raider: The Last Revelation Will Hit Store
Shelves Propelled by a Massive Marketing Blitz

Eidos Interactive's Lara Croft Character Will be
Everywhere - With a Five Million Dollar Assault
From TV to Wall-Sized Billboards and Even Candy Bars

Eidos Interactive, the makers of the wildly popular Tomb Raider series of electronic games, is pulling out the stops before and after the scheduled mid-November launch of Tomb Raider: The Last Revelation, starring virtual celebrity and soon-to-be movie star Lara Croft.

With a multi-million dollar print, television and online advertising campaign, Eidos will grab global mindshare to promote Lara Croft's return to both the PC and PlayStation game console for the holiday season. The massive advertising push will be supplemented by a dedicated Point of Purchase (POP) program and gigantic billboards in six major cities.

In a major departure this year, Lara will make a splash herself separate from the game with new merchandise introductions nearly every other week from October through the key Thanksgiving sales weekend:

- A Tomb Raider collectible playing card game now in stores and selling briskly.

- A Lara Croft candy bar appearing on Halloween day.

- A Tomb Raider t-shirt line now available at K-Mart, Mervyns and Millers Outpost stores.

- The latest in the Lara Croft action figure line hits stores the first week of November, while current figures continue to sell out.

- The first edition of a Tomb Raider monthly comic book, created and published by Top Cow, also arrives in stores Nov. 1

‘‘Tomb Raider: The Last Revelation will hit stores propelled by one of the biggest, most-diverse promotional and advertising campaigns in the history of gaming," explained Paul Baldwin, Eidos vice president of marketing.

Lara’s mass market appeal is also driving sales promotions between Eidos and such key manufacturers as Black Fly sunglasses and Doc Martin footware.

Eidos and Pizza Hut will team up on major a promotion, awarding five million CDs featuring a trailer for the game. The Tomb Raider: Last Revelation game demos will be distributed at Pizza Hut restaurants in a Pizza Hut/Sony promotion which will receive national television support. By Jan. 1, 2000, more than 1.5 million Tomb Raider: The Last Revelation demos will also be distributed through both a PC and PlayStation CD program. Eidos’ Sony PlayStation Game Console Front End‘‘ demo includes game sneaks to such evergreen titles as Tomb Raider Greatest Hits 1, 2 & 3 and Fighting Force Greatest Hits.

Get Ready to Race With the Pros!

CTR (Crash Team Racing) for the PlayStation Game Console Lands On Store Shelves Tuesday

Start your engines! CTR (Crash Team Racing), an extension of the wildly successful Crash Bandicoot franchise, raced into retailers nationwide Tuesday.

Available only on the PlayStation game console, CTR (Crash Team Racing) allows fans to assume the identity of their favorite characters from past Crash Bandicoot games as well as new characters introduced in this title. Plug in the Multi tap adaptor and up to four people can challenge one another in a high-speed go-cart race. CTR (Crash Team Racing) is primed to be one of the must-have products for the holidays.

Developed by Naughty Dog, Inc., and produced in partnership with Sony Computer Entertainment America, CTR (Crash Team Racing) combines the appeal of this popular character-based action-platform series with an intensely engaging, multi-player, 3D racing engine. New and familiar environments from Crash Bandicoot, Crash Bandicoot 2: Cortex Strikes Back, and Crash Bandicoot: WARPED will captivate gamers as they put their carts in high gear and speed across intricately designed race circuits.

CTR (Crash Team Racing) features a new mad scientist named Nitros Oxide, who is about to wreak havoc on Crash’s little island paradise. Nitros Oxide is obsessed with speed, claiming ‘‘fast just isn’t fast enough." He concocts a crazy idea to speed up the whole world until the end of time. It is up to Crash and his friends and foes to race to save the planet and restore a steady pace.

‘‘The Crash Bandicoot character has proved its mass popularity and appeal to gamers of all ages around the world," said Ami Blaire, director, product marketing, Sony Computer Entertainment America. ‘‘CTR (Crash Team Racing) is an exciting, high-speed, multi-player racing game that has the potential to become one of the most popular PlayStation games ever created

and will be on everyone’s wish list this holiday season."

Crash Bandicoot, Coco and the infamous Dr. Neo Cortex are the most notorious of the more than 12 playable characters, some of them hidden. Others include Tiny, Dingodile, Pura, Polar and N. Gin. More than 25 tracks can be played in five modes, including Adventure, Time Trial, Versus, Gran Prix and Battle modes. Gameplayers must pick up Bandicoot goodies and avoid environmental hazards like those pesky TNT crates. Power-ups can be used to pick up speed or to slow down opponents. Up to four players can simultaneously battle for the ultimate victory -- the checkered flag and saving the planet. In CTR (Crash Team Racing), the fiercest competition is the Battle mode, where up to four people can test their driving and combat skills.

Reassembling some of the finest talent who contributed to the previous Crash Bandicoot titles, CTR (Crash Team Racing) features Mark Mothersbaugh of Mutato Muzika and founding member/lead singer of the band Devo, composing another hit musical track for this franchise extension; and Clancy Brown, the actor best known as Kurgan in the film ‘‘Highlanders" and Sergeant Zim in ‘‘Starship Troopers," as the voice of the infamous character Dr. Neo Cortex.

Infogrames North America Sends Test Drive Off-Road 3 for the Sony PlayStation Skidding Into Stores This Week

Includes a Hummer License Exclusive For Racing Game Format and Offers A New Engine And Physics Model

Infogrames North announced Monday that the third incarnation of its highly successful Test Drive Off-Road franchise, Test Drive Off-Road 3, will begin shipping this week for the PlayStation game console. The game will also be available for the personal computer next week, and will be available for the Nintendo Game Boy Color later this fall.

‘‘There are no roads and no rules in Test Drive Off-Road 3," said Steve Allison, director of marketing for sports and racing at Infogrames North America. ‘‘Test Drive Off-Road 3 offers wider tracks, modifiable vehicles, tantalizing real-world locations and the coolest off-roading vehicles around."

Test Drive Off-Road 3 lets players modify their vehicles to create the right truck for the right track. Tires, transmission and suspension are all tunable, allowing the player to ‘‘tweak their truck" in order to enhance performance on specific tracks.

Developed internally at Infogrames North America, Test Drive Off-Road 3’s new engine and physics model allows for destructible objects and branching tracks. Players will be able to drive their vehicles through obstacles and barriers, as well as smash into trees and fences to expose alternative pathways and shortcuts. Also new to Test Drive Off-Road 3’s gameplay is a technique called feathering. To avoid losing traction, players may pump the gas to get up a hill or steep pathway.

‘‘We think that feathering brings a sense of realism to the game," said Montgomery Singman, head of internal studios at Infogrames North America. ‘‘In real life, you would have to be pumping on the gas and pushing your

vehicle to its limits to get up that hill."

Test Drive Off-Road 3 offers more than 15 licensed vehicles, including an exclusive license for a racing game format, with the AM General Hummer. Additional vehicles include, Dodge Ram V12, Dodge T-Rex and the Dodge Shelby Durango SP360, Ford Explorer, Ford F150, Saleen Explorer, Chenowth Fast Attack Vehicle, Jeep Wrangler and Jeep Grand Cherokee, Land Rover Defender 90, Nissan Pathfinder and the Nissan Frontier Truck, Subaru Outback and the Isuzu Vehicross.

Test Drive Off-Road 3 features 11 tracks in real world locations, including the swamplands of New Orleans, Louisiana; the snow covered mountains of Tibet; the hot sands of Egypt; the city streets of New York under a blizzard; the countryside of Vermont in the fall; the treacherous mountainside of Mt. Fuji; the deep, dark and foreboding Black Forest in Germany and many others.

Test Drive Off-Road 3's licensed soundtrack features Eve 6 with Leech and How much Longer and Blink 182 with Going Away To College. Also included on the soundtrack are Incubus, Diesel Boy, and Girls Against Boys.

Test Drive Off-Road 3 will feature two-player split screen racing on the PlayStation game console and supports the Dual Shockfi analog controller. The estimated retail price for Test Drive Off-Road 3 is $39.99 for the PlayStation. Test Drive Off-Road 3 for the PC will require a P2-200 with 3D accelerator card, and if not hardware accelerated: a P2-300 or better with 32 MB RAM, CD-ROM, Mouse, Direct X 6.1 compliant with video and hardware. Test Drive Off-Road 3 for the PC will retail for $29.99. For more information please visit the Test Drive Off-Road 3 website at www.tdor3.com.

Renowned Game Designer Yu Suzuki Expands On an Arcade Hit With Virtua Fighter 3tb for Sega Dreamcast

Sega of America announced Thursday that arcade smash hit "Virtua Fighter 3" is making its home console debut on the 128-bit Internet ready Sega Dreamcast videogame system as ‘‘Virtua Fighter 3tb." ‘‘Virtua Fighter 3tb" improves on this arcade classic with sophisticated fighting moves, immersive 3D arenas and all-new history mode allowing you to see the process of evolution of the Virtua Fighter series exclusive to the Sega Dreamcast version. At the request of numerous gamers worldwide, the game also features an all new ‘‘Versus Mode," offering more competitive fighting possibilities than ever before in the series. ‘‘Virtua Fighter 3tb" is now available at retailers nationwide for $49.95.

‘‘Virtua Fighter 3tb" is a game for the fighting purist. Its attention to real martial arts style and technique is unmatched in the videogame industry. The game features endless punch and kick combo possibilities, heart-pounding dodges and blocks and immersive 3D playing fields that are a breathtaking backdrop to any battle. Exclusive to the Sega Dreamcast version is the highly anticipated ‘‘Team Battle Mode." In this mode, players can go head-to-head with custom three-person teams. As characters win fights, they progress. However, they only move onward with the energy level they had from the last fight, so only players that can fight swift and smart will dominate!

‘‘Sega has the largest dedicated team of arcade developers in the industry. This resource is an incredible advantage for Sega Dreamcast," said Greg

Thomas, vice president of product development, Sega of America. ‘‘Now, thanks to the Sega Dreamcast hardware, gamers can enjoy titles such as ’Virtua Fighter 3tb’ with all new gameplay elements, 3D graphics and detail that actually outperforms many of today’s best arcade machines."

‘‘Virtua Fighter 3tb" is rich in story and character development. Each of the twelve characters found in ‘‘Virtua Fighter 3tb" have an extensive and detailed background which add an ongoing storyline to each tournament. Characters include Lau Chan, a world class Chinese Chef, a spoiled rich French youth named Lion and Sarah, a beautiful women suffering from amnesia searching for her identity.

Each character has their own unique fighting style from Jeet Kune Do to Hakkyoku-Ken. Using this knowledge, gamers must learn how to use the diverse styles of each character to defeat their opponent. To even the odds, players can practice and perfect their fighting skills in the ‘‘Training Mode" before going into battle, which lets gamers adjust the level of their opponent to learn the frequency and intensity of each fighting move. ‘‘Virtua Fighter 3tb" also includes an all new ‘‘Versus Mode," which allows gamers for the first time to select a new character for each battle in two player matches.

Lush 3D environments not only set a dazzling background for the tournament, but also affect gameplay. Featuring 13 fighting arenas including a tropical island, a subway station and the Great Wall of China, ‘‘Virtua Fighter 3tb" offers unprecedented fighting realism where characters actually react to the movements of their opponents and are influenced by their surroundings. While characters fight on wobbly boats, their weight and movement cause the boats to rise and sink with every kick and punch. One fighter might gain a height advantage while backing up stairs on top of the Great Wall of China, while another can avoid a kick by running backwards down a flight of stairs.

‘‘Virtua Fighter 3tb" is currently available at retailers nationwide and at sega.com for $49.95.

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->A-ONE Gaming Online - Online Users Growl & Purr!
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Time Is Running Out For The Jaguar Pre-orders!

Jaguar fans, now is the time to get your pre-orders in for each of the upcoming Jaguar games from Songbird Productions. Songbird needs at least 100 pre-orders for each game to make the overall release feasible, and we’re a long ways from that mark at this point.

Don’t forget, pre-ordering by Nov 1st ensures your copy of each game, plus the possibility of receiving up to $20 in Songbird coupons, early shipment of the games, a Jaguar lapel pin, and the best prices available on the new releases.

Songbird thanks each and every fan that has already submitted their pre-order. Your support is appreciated.

Sincerely,

Carl Forhan
Songbird Productions
http://songbird.atari.org

Songbird Now Accepts Credit Cards!

*** BUY NEW LYNX AND JAGUAR GAMES TODAY! ***

Songbird Productions
http://songbird.atari.org

Songbird Productions is your leading supplier of new and hard-to-find products for the Atari Lynx and Jaguar, and is committed to providing the highest level of customer support possible. To that end, Songbird has been pursuing a solution to accept credit cards for our catalog. This is a costly and time-consuming process, and not everything is in place yet.

In the meantime, Songbird Productions is pleased to announce that Multimedia 1.0 has agreed to process credit card orders for "Songbird exclusive" merchandise, including the pre-orders for the upcoming Jaguar releases.

HOW TO PAY BY CREDIT CARD:

1. Check the Songbird catalog and see which items are marked with a '*' denoting credit card support.
2. Call in your order to Multimedia 1.0 at 1-800-413-5823, or fax your order to 212-529-3117.
3. Clearly identify your order right away as a "Songbird Productions" order.
4. Provide your order, customer information, and credit card number to the Multimedia 1.0 sales representative.
5. Your order will be forwarded to Songbird Productions for approval and handling.

Note that the charge on your credit card bill will be marked as having originated from Multimedia 1.0. This is correct, and a result of the service Multimedia 1.0 is willing to extend to Songbird Productions.

For pre-orders on the upcoming Jaguar games, note that you will be charged $25 per game pre-ordered. Songbird will maintain a record of all such orders, and automatically charge the remaining balance close to the time when the game ships. Please be sure to use a credit card that to the best of your knowledge will be valid and have credit available in 4-6 months.

Songbird hopes to have secure online credit card processing available within the next few weeks, but that is not possible at this time. You must call or fax your order directly to Multimedia 1.0.

Any questions about this process, please email Songbird at songbird@atari.org.

Sincerely,

Carl Forhan
Songbird Productions
http://songbird.atari.org

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

IBM Unveils 73GB Hard Drive

On Friday IBM Corp. took the wraps of its newest hard drive, a disk that runs at 10,000RPM and can hold 73GB of data.

The Ultrastar 72ZX "can hold the equivalent of a floor of books at the New York Public Library with room to spare," the company said in a release.

IBM also announced a new technology called Active Damping, which it said protects against temperature variation and vibration.

The new drive also supports 1G-bps and 2G-bps fibre channel interfaces. It will begin shipping in the first quarter of next year.

AMD Eyes 1,000MHz Chips With New Fabrication Plant

Advanced Micro Devices Inc. is expected to escalate its battle with Intel Wednesday with the dedication of a fabrication plant capable of producing 1,000MHz processors.

The plant, called Fab 30, is key to AMD's plan to keep ahead of Intel Corp., because its state-of-the-art facilities will allow for the manufacture of Athlon processors at higher clock speeds than are currently possible.

The company will dedicate the fab, located in Dresden, Germany, Wednesday morning. The first samples of Athlons running at approximately 900MHz are expected later this quarter.

The fab is expected to begin shipping final production-level chips in the second quarter of next year and will hit volume production by the second half.

In a dedication ceremony, AMD CEO W. J. Sanders is expected to tell attendees that the fab will be producing 1GHz, or 1,000MHz, Athlon chips next year. AMD's Athlon roadmap shows those chips coming in the second half.

He is also expected to announce that pre-production chip samples using manufacturing technologies present in the fab have been produced at 900MHz and faster speeds.

The fab will produce chips that use AMD's new 0.18 micron manufacturing process along with copper interconnects. The 0.18 micron process reduces the space between transistors inside the chip from .25 micron. A micron is a 1,000th of a meter. This helps increase clock speed, while lowering power consumption and the amount of heat produced by the chip.

Copper interconnects, used in place of aluminum metal to bridge the gap between transistors, offer additional performance boosts. According to analysts switching from aluminum to copper and changing nothing else would yield a performance increase of about 10 percent. The technology to do both comes courtesy of a licensing agreement with Motorola Inc. The companies plan to collaborate to develop new chip technologies featuring copper.

Fab 30, named for the number of years since AMD was founded, cost about $1.9 billion and has been in construction since October 1996. It will manufacture Athlon chips and has also produced samples of AMD's K6-family processors.

Fab 30 will also house AMD's Dresden Design Center, an engineering operation that will create future AMD processors and develop supporting technologies for current processors.

Intel eyes same prize While AMD plans to hit the 1GHz mark with Athlon, Intel Corp. is eyeing the same milestone with a new processor architecture.

Code-named Willamette, Intel's first 1GHz desktop chip is expected in late 2000 or early 2001. It will use a design different than that used by current Pentium III chips, according to the company. Sources say that Willamette's new architecture is based on the processor core of Intel's forthcoming Itanium chip and that it will use a 423 pin socket, whose design is similar to that of the 370 pin Socket 370 now in use.

Intel is also planning to introduce a truckload of new Pentium III chips next Monday, including desktop Pentium III chips running at clock speeds of up to 733MHz, manufactured on a 0.18 micron process.

AMD's current top Athlon chip runs at 700MHz on a .25 micron process with aluminum interconnects. It is mated with a 200MHz system bus. AMD is also planning to up is bus speed to 266MHz for high-end applications next year, coupling the faster bus with double data rate dynamic RAM, also running at 266MHz.

SOAP Could Slip Up Microsoft Rivals

Microsoft has developed a new technology for exchanging information over the Web that could give the software giant an advantage over Sun Microsystems, IBM, and other competitors if adopted by a standards body.

The new technology, called the Simple Object Access Protocol (SOAP), based on the increasingly popular Web standard for data exchange called the Extensible Markup Language (XML), will let business software programs communicate over the Internet, regardless of the programming model on which they're based.

In many ways, SOAP, and Microsoft’s plans to establish it as a standard, represent a reversal of Microsoft’s past attempts to steer the software development business. The company has many times been accused of attempting to control the market with Windows, a de facto proprietary standard. With SOAP, Microsoft is proposing an open standard that would nullify a competitor’s proprietary advantage.

Microsoft competitors, not surprisingly, are critical of the company’s plans.

"What SOAP does is a significant threat to the rate of penetration that [Sun and Java] are receiving," said analyst Jeetu Patel, of Doculabs.

SOAP, which SOAP doesn’t require any Microsoft software, is a network protocol that lets software objects developed using different languages communicate with each other. Microsoft sees it as effectively leveling the playing field between Windows and development strategies based on Java. Instead of being forced to chose one model, companies will be free to select whichever is best suited to solving the problem at hand, Microsoft reasons.

The benefit to Microsoft? The company is hoping that greater compatibility between Windows-based software and Java and Unix-based systems could lead to greater adoption of Windows 2000, the company’s forthcoming operating system.

SOAP, in effect, could be bad news for Sun, IBM, Oracle, and other Java backers since it could nullify the effectiveness of proprietary "lock-in" marketing strategies.

At issue is the slugfest between Microsoft and its competitors over the programming models software developers use. Microsoft has its own programming model based on the Windows operating system, called the Component Object Model (COM). Its competitors support Enterprise JavaBeans (EJBs) and Common Object Request Broker Architecture (CORBA), two programming models that are tightly integrated with each other.

Sun and Microsoft, which are still locked in a legal battle over Java, strive to lock big companies into their respective technologies for software development. In theory, companies that decide to build the bulk of their systems using Sun’s Java technology and CORBA-based protocols, for instance, will be less likely to adopt Microsoft’s COM since their developers would be less familiar with the intricacies of Windows.

In practice, most companies build and run a mix of applications built using COM, Windows, CORBA, Java, and other technologies. A protocol that gives companies greater freedom to link systems both internally and across the Net with other companies is expected to be welcomed warmly, said analysts.

Microsoft’s plans for SOAP are also driven in part by some frustration at the software giant. Currently, large corporations favor Java and CORBA for large-scale applications by a 2-to-1 margin over Microsoft’s COM, according to a report by Forrester Research. But most companies use CORBA-based technologies grudgingly: the technology is difficult to master and tricky to implement. Microsoft, on the other hand, has spent considerable time and energy promoting easy to use tools. An easy way to meld the two worlds could boost sales of Windows for server systems.

Currently, each programming model had its own proprietary communications

protocol, so it’s difficult for businesses that use EJBs and CORBA to exchange information and communicate with businesses that use COM.

SOAP would replace Microsoft’s current proprietary protocol called DCOM for communication over the Internet. Because SOAP is based on XML, it’s compatible with all programming models and allows businesses to easily exchange data with each other over the Internet, said analyst Mike Gilpin, of Giga Information Group.

Microsoft plans to submit the new protocol to an international standards body for approval soon. Like many software firms, Microsoft is supporting XML in its entire product line, and the company says it has no plans to hijack the Web standard.

"This is about openness and integration, and SOAP is simply a manifestation of our commitment to XML and the Web," said John Montgomery, Microsoft’s product manager.

Or, according to James Utzschneider, director of Microsoft’s XML-based BizTalk initiative: "Our competitors seem to claim that any time we do anything with XML, we are trying to make it proprietary. That’s simply not the case. Our strategy is to adopt XML across our product line as a native wire representation for data. Open standards all the way. Period."

Analysts say SOAP will change the way businesses communicate with each other and the protocol already enjoys the support of some software firms, including Iona Technologies, which supports both EJBs and CORBA.

But Sun and IBM executives are more skeptical. In fact, Sun executives say they won’t support SOAP, a strategy that does not surprise analysts. Nevertheless, Sun executives say SOAP is all Microsoft hype.

"This is another overblown announcement coming from Microsoft. It’s nothing new and has no new value to what’s out there," said Nancy Lee, Sun’s XML senior product manager for the Java platform group.

"They’re trying to create some momentum around what they’re doing with Windows DNA 2000," she said, referring to Microsoft’s new Web software strategy.

Scott Hebner, IBM’s program director for e-business technology marketing, questions Microsoft’s tactics. The effort should originate from a standards organization, not from Microsoft, said Hebner, who believes groups like the World Wide Web Consortium are starting to tackle the issue.

But Microsoft executives said they wanted to develop the basics of the technology before submitting the proposal to a standards body, where SOAP can be tweaked by other companies.

Sun’s Lee said while SOAP supports XML and HTTP, the protocol, as it stands, does have some proprietary software code because it was developed mostly by Microsoft.

Lee also argued that communication between applications using simple XML and HTTP would work without the need of a new protocol.

Analysts, however, disagree. Gilpin said simple XML over HTTP works, but is of limited value. A protocol provides the guidelines to exchange information over XML. Otherwise, each business would have to discuss how to format their XML and handle interactions, he said.

Gartner Group analyst David Smith also dismisses Lee’s argument that existing EJB and CORBA protocols will work. The EJB protocol works in a Java to Java environment, Smith said, "But the world isn’t just Java."

Smith said SOAP will solve a compatibility issue facing businesses today.

"SOAP is not the only answer, but it’s the right approach. The world wants more interoperability," Smith said. "We’ve never solved it. And we haven’t heard from any other vendors what the alternative is."

Microsoft Attempt To Cut Justice Funding Draws Fire

A newspaper report that Microsoft Corp. lobbyists and allies are pressing Congress to reduce funding for the Justice Department antitrust division sparked anger among antitrust lawyers Friday.

‘‘It’s like the Mafia trying to defund the FBI," said a prominent member of the Washington antitrust bar, who asked not to be identified, condemning the lobbying effort.

The Washington Post reported that Microsoft representatives have urged House and Senate members to cut $9 million from President Clinton’s proposed budget for the antitrust division in fiscal 2000.

The administration sought $114.3 million for fiscal 2000, which began Oct 1. The Senate appropriated $112.3 million, while the House allocated only $105.2 million.

The Justice Department antitrust division has been pursuing a landmark antitrust case against Microsoft, which it alleges abused monopoly power it holds in the Windows operating system.

A spokesman for Microsoft acknowledged that Microsoft had been speaking to members of Congress.

‘‘We have certainly been talking to members who asked about this issue and discussed our serious concerns with the way the (Department of Justice) has handled our case," said Rick Miller of Microsoft. But he said cutting funds for the Justice Department was ‘‘not a major priority of Microsoft."

The Justice Department issued a cautious statement.

‘‘We think that the Justice Department’s law enforcement budget should be based on the needs of law enforcement, not based on a single interest," said Gina Talamona, a spokeswoman for the Justice Department, responding to the newspaper report.

Jan McDavid, a lawyer with the Washington firm of Hogan & Hartson who chairs the American Bar Association’s antitrust section, pointed a reporter to the section’s policy that it "opposes the use of the congressional budget and appropriations process to intervene in or influence ongoing antitrust enforcement matters."

Albert Foer, president of the American Antitrust Institute, said in a statement that ‘‘Microsoft’s salvo is clearly an attempt to leverage its position through intimidation."

Both the House and Senate have completed work on an appropriations bill that includes money for the Justice Department.

A conference committee must decide which level between those two amounts should be appropriated.

The Post also reported that Microsoft sponsored an all-expense paid trip for a number of think tank representatives. The trip included a baseball game and dinner at a restaurant.

One of those who traveled was Grover Norquist, president of Americans for Tax Reform. The Post said Norquist, a longtime supporter of Microsoft during the antitrust case, got $40,000 in lobbying payments from Microsoft for the last six months of 1998.

Microsoft Decision To Be Announced On ’A Friday’

District Judge Thomas Penfield Jackson will issue his findings on the Microsoft Corp. case on a Friday at 6:30 p.m. EDT, the court announced Tuesday -- but the court did not say which Friday.

‘‘The findings of fact in U.S. v. Microsoft, State of New York, et al v. Microsoft, will issue on a Friday evening at 6:30 p.m.," the court announced. When the day does come, the parties will have two hours notice.

The Justice Department and 19 states allege Microsoft violated the nation’s antitrust laws and Jackson held a 76-day trial on the matter. His first major decision in the case will be findings of fact.

Congressional Spam Bill Due

The U.S. House of Representatives Tuesday began consideration of a bill that would create a nationwide list of people who do not want to receive junk email, known in Internet parlance as "spam."

The Unsolicited Electronic Mail Act of 1999, written and cosponsored by Rep. Heather Wilson (R-New Mexico), would have the Federal Communications Commission create and maintain the list and would penalize those who send unsolicited messages to email account holders who have added their names to it.

Under this so-called opt-out system, spam recipients who have been on the list for 30 days could sue for $500 per piece of spam sent to them. Defendants found by a court to have "willingly or knowingly" violated an FCC order to stop sending spam could be fined three times that amount.

Considered by some to be long overdue, the proposed legislation addresses a phenomenon often thought to be one of the Internet’s worst features. Each month, uncounted numbers of unsolicited advertisements are sent to millions of users, filling in-boxes and taxing email servers with generally unwanted pitches. But some contend the measure doesn’t go far enough, even though it appears to skirt the edge of restricting commercial speech.

The bill also would criminalize the sending of mail without a valid return address identifying where a recipient can send mail asking not to be sent more spam. Many spammers falsify their return addresses so they cannot be traced.

In addition, the bill would let Internet service providers opt out of transmitting spam, either on the sending or the receiving end. The bill also would let ISPs charge spammers to cover the costs of transmitting the spam.

Violations of the ISP provisions would result in $500-per-instance fines.

Wilson said her bill strikes a balance between the interests of senders of unsolicited commercial email on the one hand and its recipients and their Internet service providers on the other.

"It puts the power in the hands of the recipient," Wilson said in an interview with CNET News.com. "But the idea here is you don’t ban commercial email, you don’t restrict freedom of speech, and ISPs shouldn’t be required to carry [spam] without compensation."

Opt-out systems have drawn fire from anti-spam groups, which favor laws that ban sending spam outright. Some prefer a so-called opt-in system, in which senders of commercial mail cannot send spam unless the recipient has asked to receive such mailings first.

Anti-spam groups object in particular to the creation of an FCC-maintained list of email account holders.

"We’re concerned about this bill because it gives the FCC a whole bunch of regulatory authority, including the duty of maintaining a list of everyone in the U.S. that doesn’t want junk email," said John Mozena, head of the Committee Against Unsolicited Commercial Email (CAUCE). "That scares us. And ISPs in general don’t want to deal with the FCC."

Wilson scoffed at concerns about the FCC list, noting that the postal service for decades has maintained a similar opt-out list for postal commercial mail.

Wilson criticized a competing House bill that would ban spam altogether.

"I think there’s value in getting unsolicited commercial email and using the Internet for commerce, just like I like getting a catalog in the mail I didn’t ask for," Wilson said. "It’s true that ISPs and their advocacy groups would rather have an outright prohibition, but I don’t think that would withstand a constitutional challenge on basis of free speech."

Congress has been slow to pass any spam legislation, and so far individual states have taken the lead on the matter. Wilson’s penalties would be "in addition to and not in lieu of any other provision of state law relating to the transmission of electronic mail messages," according to a copy of the bill obtained by CNET News.com.

Despite federal lawmakers’ lagging on spam legislation so far, Wilson sounded bullish on her bill’s prospects. She cited her seat on the powerful Commerce Committee, as well as bipartisan sponsorship of the bill, as augurs for its success. Rep.Gene Greene (D-Texas) is a cosponsor.

The bill’s introduction will come on the heels of a survey showing

consumer support for governmental regulation of spam. According to the survey, 76 percent of respondents think the government should regulate spam "in some way." About the same proportion said fraudulent return addresses should be made illegal, and valid contact information should be required. About 67 percent said ISPs should be able to refuse to send or deliver spam. The survey is published by CAUCE and Survey.com under their joint venture the UCE Research Initiative.

Government OKs Kids' Online Privacy Regulations

The government laid out new rules for protecting kids' privacy on the Internet Wednesday, allowing companies to send e-mail to parents seeking permission to ask children questions - but only if the information is not shared with other companies.

The rules are designed to tell companies how to comply with a new federal privacy law that bans them from collecting personal information from children without a parent's permission.

One of the most contentious provisions involved a compromise allowing businesses for the next two years to send e-mail to parents.

The new rules from the Federal Trade Commission, approved 4-0, are expected to have a dramatic impact on hundreds of popular Internet sites aimed at children, which typically offer online games and entertainment in exchange for personal information valuable to marketers.

Catherine Benjamin, a mother of two young children in Rolling Meadows, Ill., called the law ''long overdue" and bristled at how easy children online can be persuaded to disclose even the most personal details.

''It scares us," said Mrs. Benjamin, who recently warned her 12-year-old niece about these risks. ''Children just give out information on the Internet. There's a lot of wonderful opportunities on the Internet ... (but) it can become a dangerous tool."

The FTC will begin enforcing the new rules in April.

''There's a real problem out there," said FTC Chairman Robert Pitofsky. ''We're going to give the industry six months to get its act together to make changes. After that, we'll monitor these Web sites and we'll take enforcement action."

The FTC said Web sites that share children's information with other companies must obtain a parent's permission through mailed or faxed paperwork, calls to a toll-free number, through use of a credit-card number or via e-mail using nascent digital signature technology.

The provision over a parent's consent was among the most controversial. E-mail is the most convenient and immediate method for granting permission, but it's also simple to impersonate another person online - especially for kids who often know more about technology than their parents.

''E-mail is completely useless," said Stephen Savitzky, a father of two young girls in Silicon Valley who runs a Web site with warnings for kids. ''What's to keep the kids from giving their own e-mail address, or one of

their many e-mail addresses? It’s trivial."

The new law, the Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act, requires commercial Web sites generally to obtain consent from parents before asking children under 13 for their names, addresses, telephone numbers or other identifying information.

‘‘The FTC did a good, balanced job," said Ron Plesser, an attorney who worked with the Direct Marketing Association and other industry groups. ‘‘Everything’s a compromise - it’s not all great for industry, but it resolves some major concerns."

Jason Catlett of Junkbusters Corp., who has frequently criticized the FTC on other privacy issues, praised it for a ‘‘remarkably good job."

‘‘The intent of Congress and the common sense expectations of parents seemed to have survived intact," Catlett said.

Pitofsky said that in two years the FTC will reconsider whether e-mail can be more widely used to seek a parent’s permission, as techniques improve for ensuring the identity of e-mail authors.

The industry, which generally supported the privacy law, had warned regulators that imposing barriers that are too onerous between a child and his favorite Web site might discourage kids from spending time online.

But Pitofsky said rules requiring a parent to mail or fax their permission - a process that could take days - will be in effect ‘‘only if the company has in mind collecting the information, sorting it out and renting it. That is a sensitive enough area that the more rigorous approaches are justified."

The new law does not require companies to obtain a parent’s permission to send a child information on a one-time basis, such as a digital coupon for a video game.

The privacy law, enacted in October 1998, was prompted by an FTC study last year of 1,400 Web sites, including one where children were asked to give their names, addresses, e-mail addresses and ages and say whether they ever received gifts of stocks, cash, savings bonds or certificates of deposit.

California Governor Rejects E-mail Bill

Gov. Gray Davis vetoed a bill that would have required companies to tell their workers before monitoring their e-mail, saying the measure tramples on employer rights and leaves them open to unjust lawsuits.

The move is likely to further the debate about the limits to which companies can monitor an employee’s actions while on the job, including computer files and usage and reading e-mails sent through the company network.

Davis likened e-mail monitoring to other employer rights, such as the right to limit personal long-distance phone calls. He also noted that businesses can be sued if employees use work computers to defame or harass someone.

Encyclopedia Now Free on Internet

The Encyclopaedia Britannica, afraid of becoming just a dusty relic of the pre-computer age, is making its 32-volume set available for free on the Internet.

From a-ak (an ancient East Asian music) to Zywiec (a town in Poland), the Rolls Royce of encyclopedias was there in its entirety starting Tuesday at the company's retooled Web site, www.britannica.com.

The 231-year-old company dumped door-to-door sales three years ago and hopes now to make money selling advertising on its site. The move may have been inevitable in an era when students doing homework are more likely to get their information from a computer than from a book.

The privately held company won't reveal revenue figures, but sales of its print volumes - which cost $1,250 a set and are now sold mostly to schools and other institutions - have seen a steep decline, admitted Don Yannias, chief executive of Britannica.com.

In an Internet-dominated market, ''you have to be free to be relevant," said Jorge Cauz, senior president of Britannica.com Inc., the new company that holds the Chicago encyclopedia publisher's digital properties.

Free encyclopedias are only part of the lure. The Web site also will offer current information from newspapers, news agencies and 70 magazines as well as e-mail, weather forecasts and financial market reports.

Analysts who follow Britannica say its belated but aggressive moves into the electronic world, including some significant success with CD-ROM sales over the past three years, just may work.

''They're clearly not going to be able to recoup their revenues in the short term," said Aram Sinnreich of Jupiter Communications Inc. in New York. ''But the move just might save them in the long run."

The early response was promising. Britannica said the site received millions of hits Tuesday, temporarily blocking access for some. The company said it expected to clear up the problems by the end of the day.

For generations, Britannica set the standard for encyclopedias. The leather-bound books were sold door-to-door, via direct mail, or at shopping mall kiosks.

At its peak in 1989, Britannica had estimated revenue of $650 million and a worldwide sales force of 7,500. But with direct sales abandoned, the staff shrank as low as 280 and is now about 400.

The company lost ground badly after it spurned Microsoft, which went on to team up with discount encyclopedia publisher Funk & Wagnalls to produce a colorful, multimedia encyclopedia on CD-ROM in 1993. Britannica's own CD-ROM version, released a year later, was low on graphics and did not fare as well.

Britannica became the first encyclopedia available on the Web in 1994, but there was an $85-a-year subscription fee.

Since Swiss investor Jacob Safra bought Britannica in 1996, the company has been making a bigger push for the electronic market. The online subscription fees were dropped and CD-ROM sales began to account for the bulk of revenue.

‘‘Before we were more backward-looking - looking back at historical events," Yannias said. ‘‘Now we can be right on the brink of current events, incorporating the news with the foundations of history."

Gas Powered Computers Closer To Reality

A super-fast, minuscule molecular computer driven by gases may be a step closer to reality thanks to research by a Berlin-based chemist, New Scientist magazine reported Thursday.

James La Clair, formerly with the Scripps Research Institute in California, had developed a molecule that could be switched on and off by nitrogen and carbon dioxide, it said. "This finding provides a new cornerstone for future electronics," La Clair told the weekly magazine. Molecular computing could help to solve a major problem facing the technology industry - the physical limitations of silicon-based transistors. Scientists at Intel, have warned of problems with the further scaling down of transistors.

Blue Mountain Selling Web Site

Blue Mountain Arts Inc. is in talks with a number of companies to sell its Web site, a free greeting card service that is one of the most highly trafficked sites on the Internet, for about $1 billion, the Wall Street Journal said.

The Journal said the leading candidate to acquire bluemountainarts.com is EToys, and others who have looked at the site are CMGI and Excite AtHome. The deal is likely to be an all-stock transaction, the paper said. The company held talks to sell the site earlier in the year to America Online Inc., Yahoo and Amazon.com, the paper said, but those talks were unsuccessful.

Why Are ISP Pricing Plans So Different?

In London it’s free. In Berlin it’s $65 a year. And in San Francisco it can run you $21.95 a month. Or nothing at all.

As America Online launches international services, it has been forced to price to market-slashing subscriber costs in Europe, where it can take a cut of phone companies’ local toll charges. But in America, where free ISPs such as NetZero and 1stUp.com have been gaining ground with consumers, it doesn’t appear to be facing the same pricing pressures.

AOL has made some concessions to the price-shopper crowd. It now categorizes its subscribers as either "premium" or "value" users, for

example, and gives a $400 rebate on a PC if users sign up for three years of service with its cheaper CompuServe service. But the company hasn't surrendered the field completely, charging top dollar--$21.95 a month--for its main offerings.

Similarly, Microsoft--which reportedly is considering launching free Internet access services throughout Europe--recently announced an increase of $2 in its ISP subscription rates, to $21.95.

In short, the growth of free ISPs in the United States--in contrast to Europe--has sparked a peculiar price war in which cheaper isn't always better, or so some seem willing to bet.

"People don't buy price, and I think that's true of almost any product category," said AOL spokeswoman Ann Brackbill. "They buy the service they want at the best price."

By default, AOL has become a litmus test for the effects of free ISPs on the U.S. market. And for a while, the online giant's stock suffered as analysts waited to gauge how consumers reacted to free services.

Although hard numbers don't yet exist, analysts are becoming more confident that the future is not destined for a fire sale.

"When Microsoft indicated a few weeks ago that they weren't going to do anything for free; that news helped AOL's stock," said Andrea Williams, an equity analyst at E*Offering. "And you won't see any evidence that AOL has been hurt by the popularity of NetZero."

Rather, all the hype over different ways to pay for Net access highlights a fear among ISPs that they are becoming a dime a dozen, according to Joe Laszlo, an analyst at market research firm Jupiter Communications.

"ISPs have tried several different strategies for getting away from a commoditized model," Laszlo said. "Now they're trying pricing as a way to break away from the pack and to do something unique to attract consumers' attention."

A different equation Free ISPs have caught on big among Internet-hungry consumers in the United Kingdom. Heavyweights like Freeserve have scooped up millions of users in a relatively short time, forcing AOL to launch its own Netscape-branded free ISP service to compete.

But free ISPs in the United States are a different breed.

"It's working in Europe because of the telephone structure," said David Simons, managing director of research firm Digital Video Investments. "Free services that exist in the U.S. are doing it strictly as an advertising model."

Unlike the United States, European countries charge local phone calls by the minute, similar to the way American long distance telephone companies also meter calls. Free ISPs in Britain make money by taking a cut from the local phone charges.

In contrast, free ISPs in the United States hold truer to the moniker. Since local phone calls are billed at a flat rate, subscribers to services such as NetZero or AltaVista's free ISP 1stUp.com access the Internet at no cost.

So far, consumers have responded by signing on to these services at a fast clip. In close to a year, NetZero has signed on 1.68 million subscribers. And since 1stUp.com launched two months ago, the service has gained 550,00 users.

But there's a catch. NetZero earns its revenue by constantly subjecting users to banner advertisements embedded into its interface. And 1stUp.com lets sites that use its free Net access capabilities serve users direct mail and other product offers.

A revolution waiting to happen? For Charles Katz, CEO of 1stUp.com, which was recently acquired by Internet investment firm CMGI, consumers will be hard-pressed to turn down the lure of free access over the long haul.

"Why should you pay for something if you can get that service for free?" Katz asked, echoing a crowd of giveaway schemers who offer a mind-boggling array of goods and services at no charge.

While the advertising model that Katz and others are banking on is equally unproven, he's confident that at the end of the day, consumers will always abandon the package deal in favor of the freebie.

Katz considers the idea that consumers are willing to pay for a service with content or community "a very short-sighted view."

"There are plenty of Web sites out there with good content, and if they offer a free ISP service, I don't see how that argument can hold water," Katz said.

P.O.V. Magazine Grades Web Sites

Want to make the most of your life? Consult a Web site to find out just how much time you have. If you enter your birth date and gender at www.deathclock.com, you will get your projected date of death. If you were born, say, on March 16, 1969, and male, you will die on Dec. 26, 2042, based on average lifespan. That's less than 1.4 billion seconds away. The Death Clock bills itself as "the Internet's friendly reminder that life is slipping away."

It is one of the seven worst Web sites identified in the upcoming issue of P.O.V. magazine, which hit newsstands Tuesday. The magazine describes the sites as "so achingly baa-aad that they are actually good."

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